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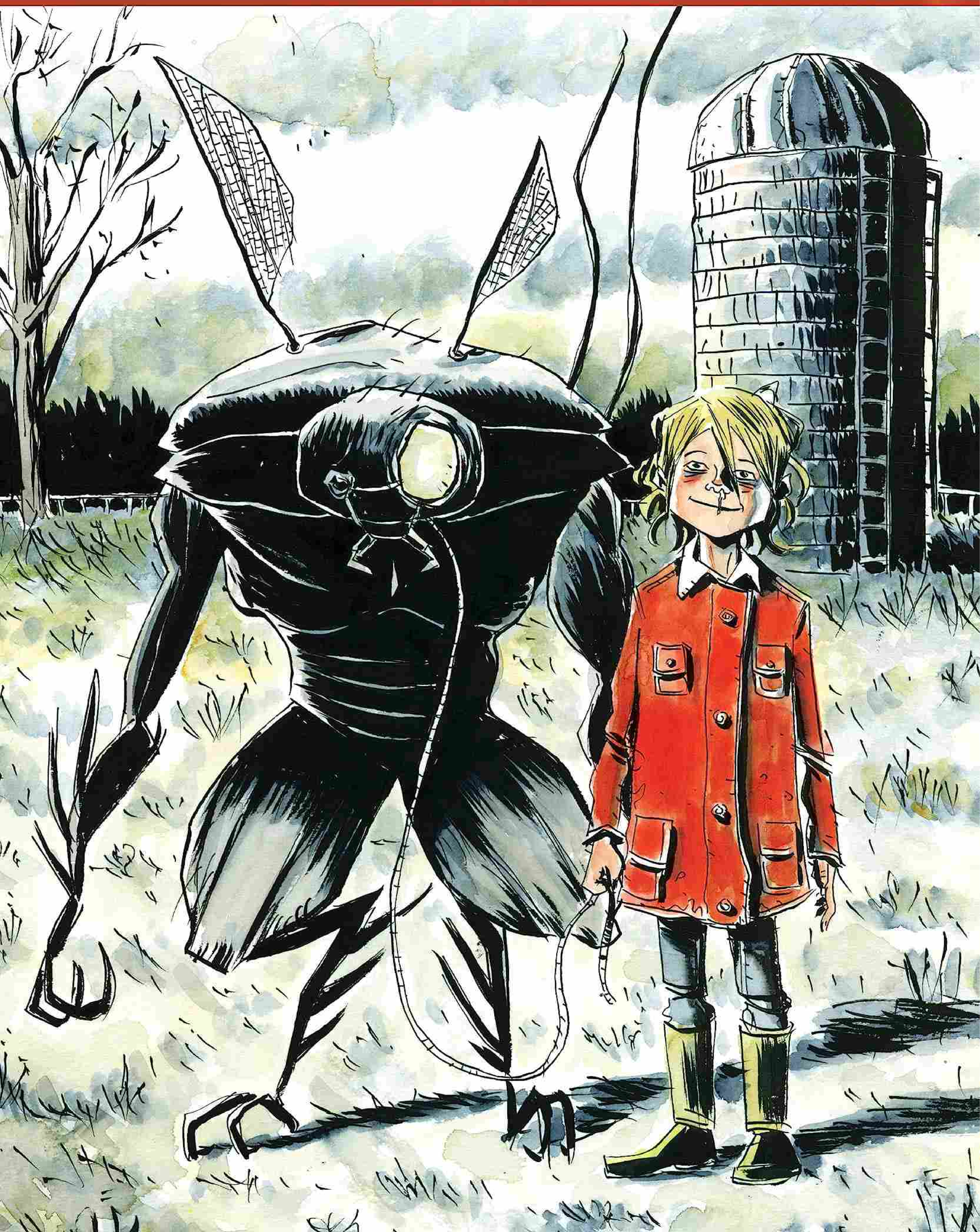
JEFF LEMIRE

# FISHFLIES™



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--THINK I GOT ENOUGH FOR A DRUMSTICK OR MAYBE AN ESKIMO PIE?

I DON'T THINK THEY'RE CALLED ESKIMO PIES ANYMORE.

WHAT?

THEY'RE JUST ICE CREAM SANDWICHES NOW. ESKIMO PIE IS RACIST, I THINK.

SHUT THE *FUCK* UP!

OW!

DON'T CRY ABOUT IT.

I'M NOT CRYING, BUT YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO PUNCH ME!

WHATEVER.

HEY, DO YOU GUYS HAVE ANY EXTRA? MY MOM ONLY GAVE ME, LIKE, A DOLLAR FIFTY. I CAN'T GET ANYTHING FOR THAT.

NO WAY!

YOUR MOM GAVE YOU LIKE *TWENTY BUCKS!*

SO?

SO, CAN YOU JUST GIVE ME LIKE A BUCK OR SOMETHING?

I GUESS. YOU GOTTA PAY ME BACK, THOUGH.

FINE.

?

CRUNCH

EW!

HOLY SHIT!

BELLE RIVER
mini·mart
Open 7 days
GUYS...
OH MY GOD! THAT IS SO FUCKING GROSS!
FISHFLIES.
WHAT?
YEAH. THEY COME FOR, LIKE, A WEEK EVERY SUMMER AND THEN THEY ALL DIE AT ONCE. I THINK THEY LIKE THE LIGHT.

NO WAY AM I WALKING ACROSS THAT. FORGET IT!

PUSSY. I'LL DO IT.

CRUNCH!

EW! FUCK THAT! DISGUSTING!

HA HA! I TOLD YOU!

WELL, I GUESS WE'RE NOT GETTING POPSICLES.

YOU GO!

NO WAY!

COME ON! DON'T BE A BABY!

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO JUST RAN BACK SCREAMING!

LOOK, I'M LENDING YOU MONEY. IF YOU GO, YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO PAY ME BACK.

...

FINE. BUT IF I DO IT, I WANT THE ***WHOLE*** TWENTY BUCKS!

SURE. I'LL GIVE YOU ALL TWENTY... BUT YOU GOTTA DO IT WITH YOUR *SHOES OFF!*

HA! YEAH!

EW! *NO WAY!*

OKAY, FINE. FORGET IT THEN. I *KNEW* YOU WERE TOO SCARED.

NO. I'LL DO IT. BUT YOU GOTTA GIVE ME THE MONEY FIRST.

YEAH, RIGHT. HE'S NOT GOING TO DO IT!

I *AM TOO.* JUST GIMME THE MONEY.

SHOES FIRST!

FINE. WHATEVER.

SHIT!

OKAY, BUT YOU BETTER GO ALL THE WAY INTO THE STORE.

I WILL.

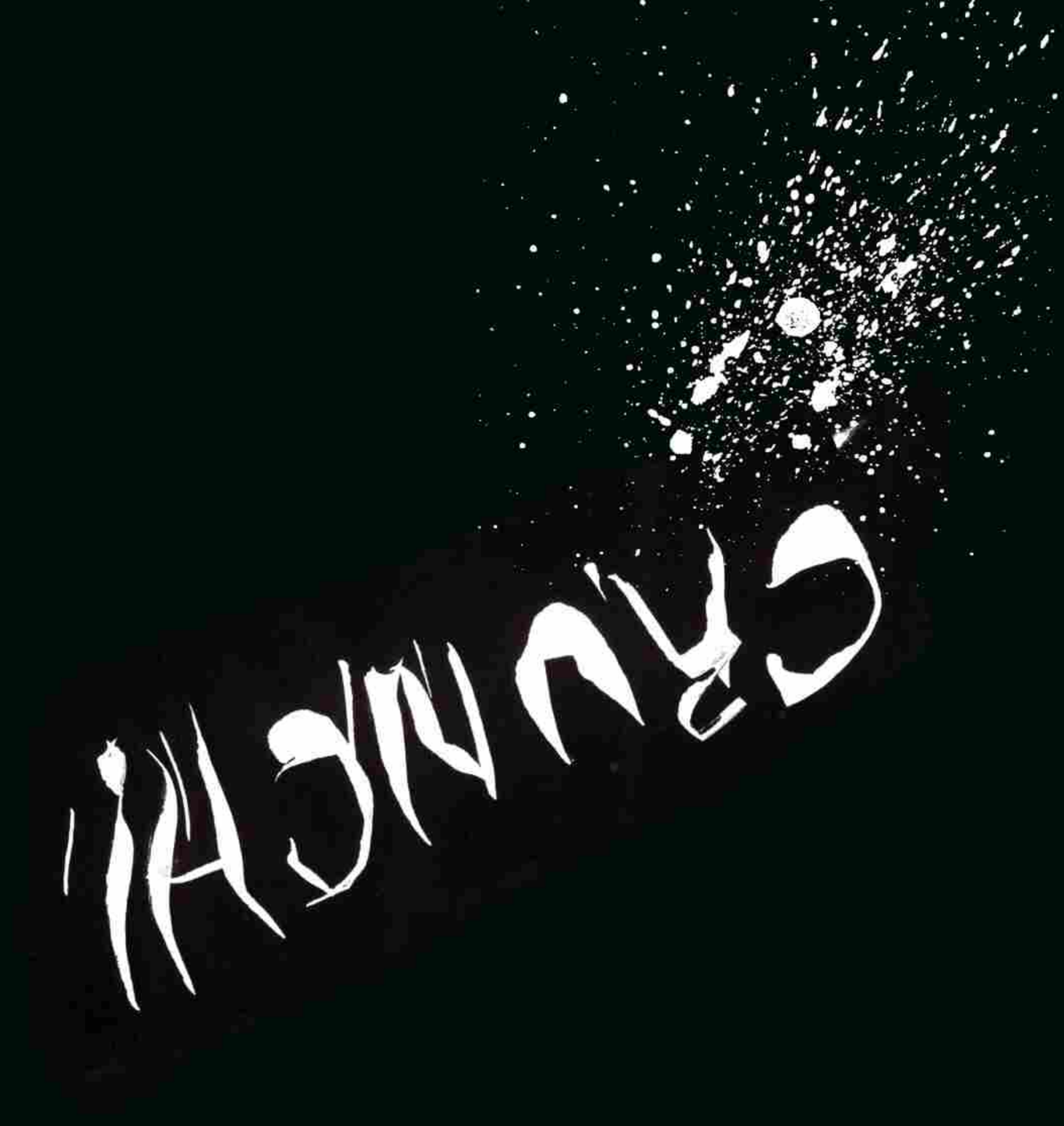
NO WAY HE DOES IT.

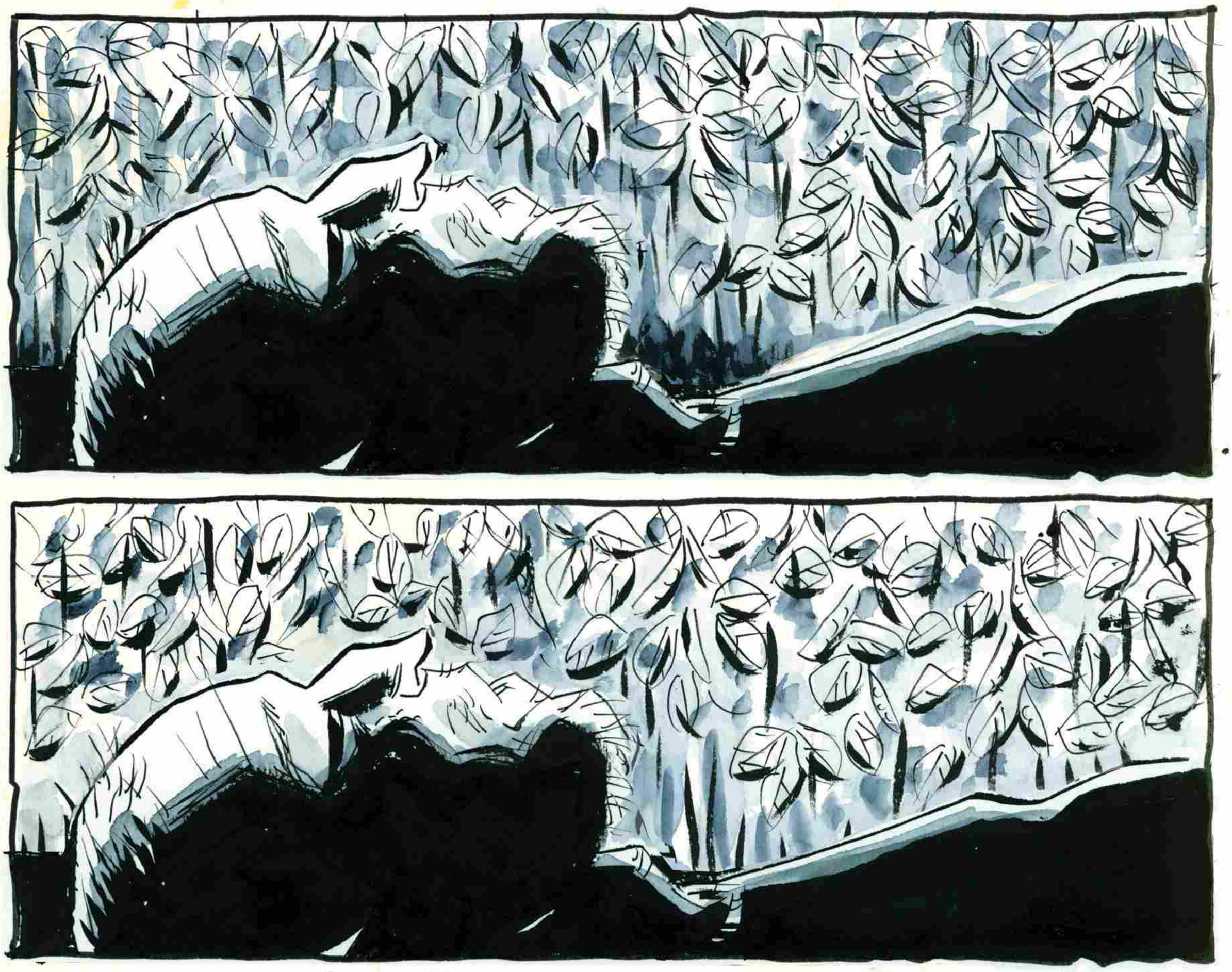
CRUNCH!

OH MY GOD! THAT IS SO VILE!

CRUNCH!

CRUNCH!




GASP!

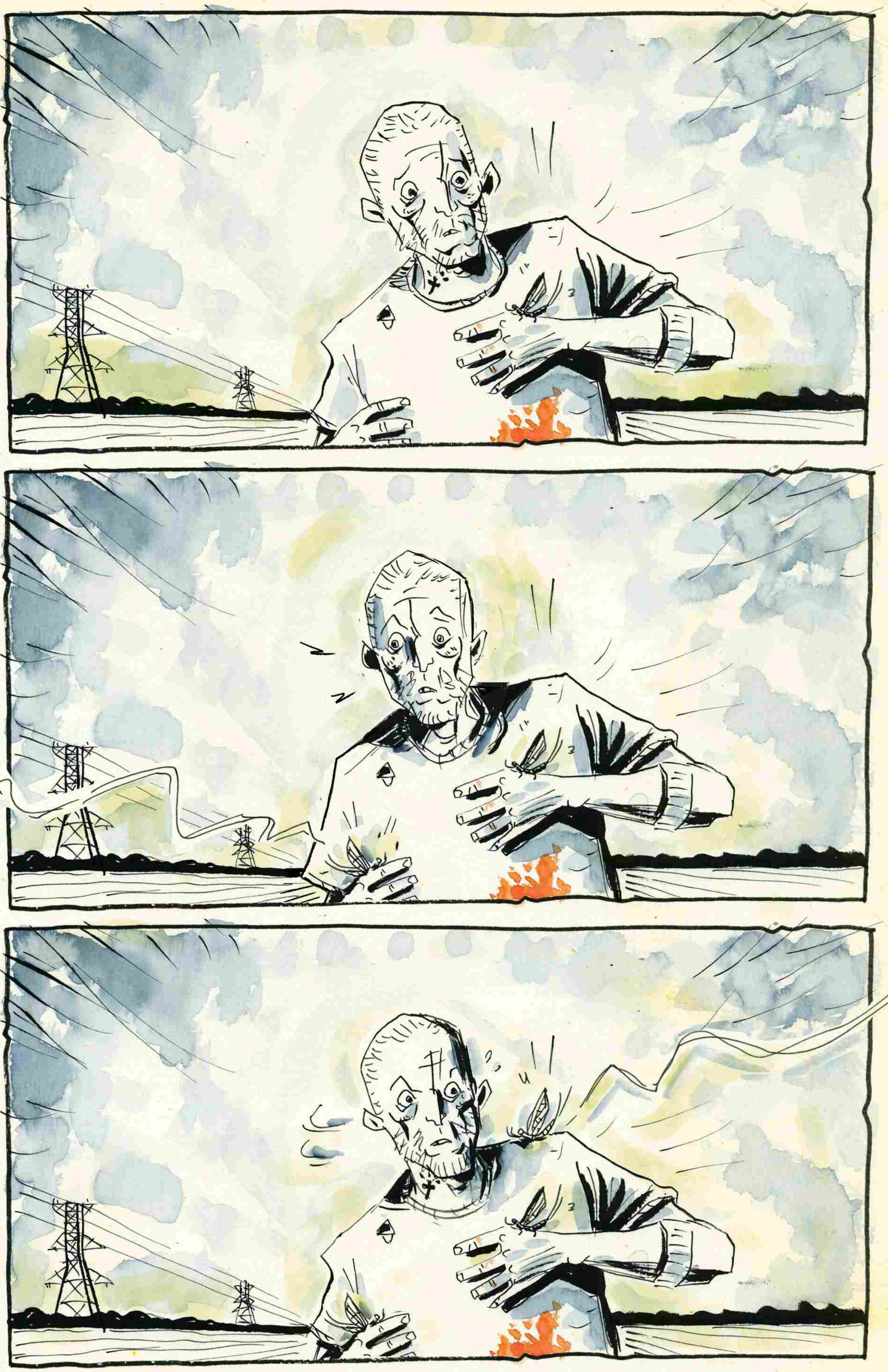
--UNGH.

ARK!
ARK!

ARK!
ARK!

--HUFF--HUFF--HUFF--

--UNGH!

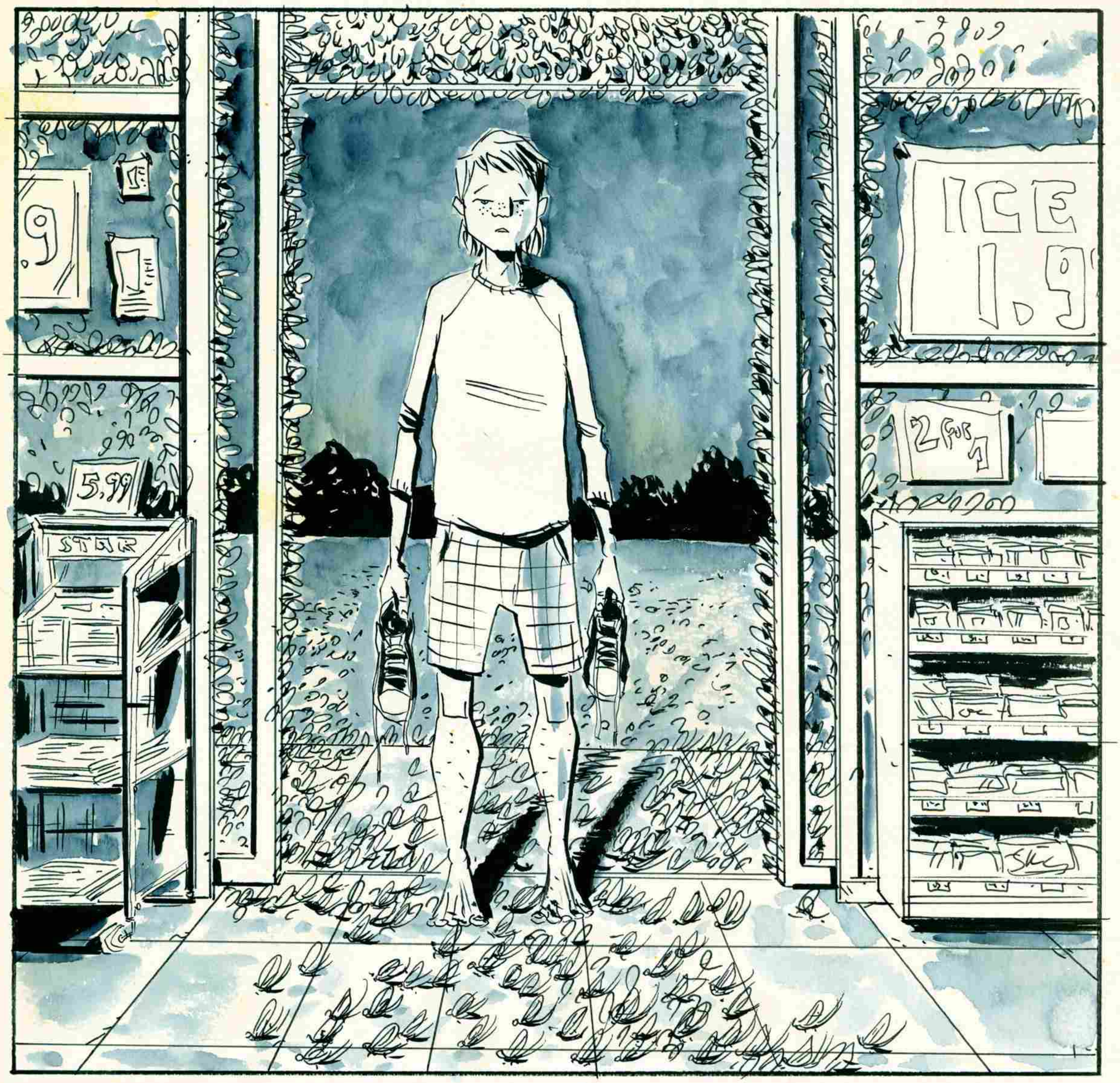


CRUNCH

CRUNCH

DON'T SLIP!

YEAH. I...

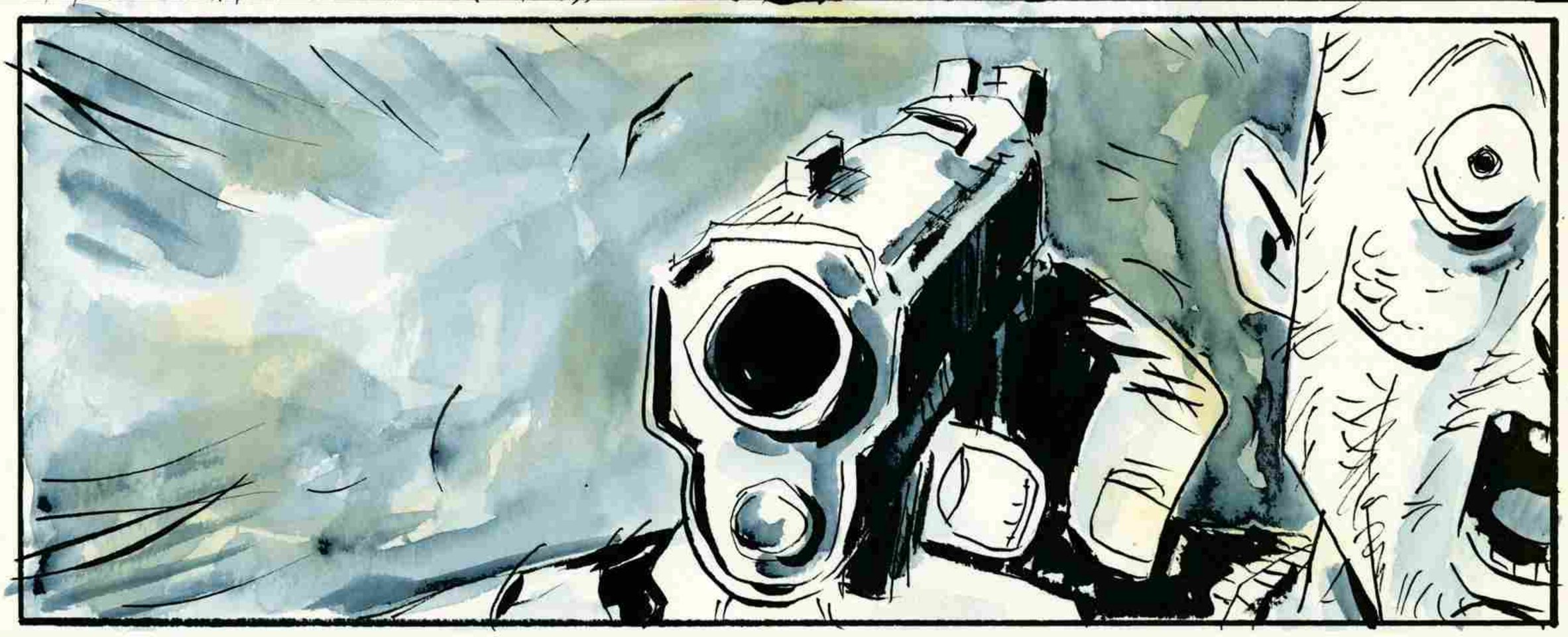

5.99
STAR

HEY!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?!

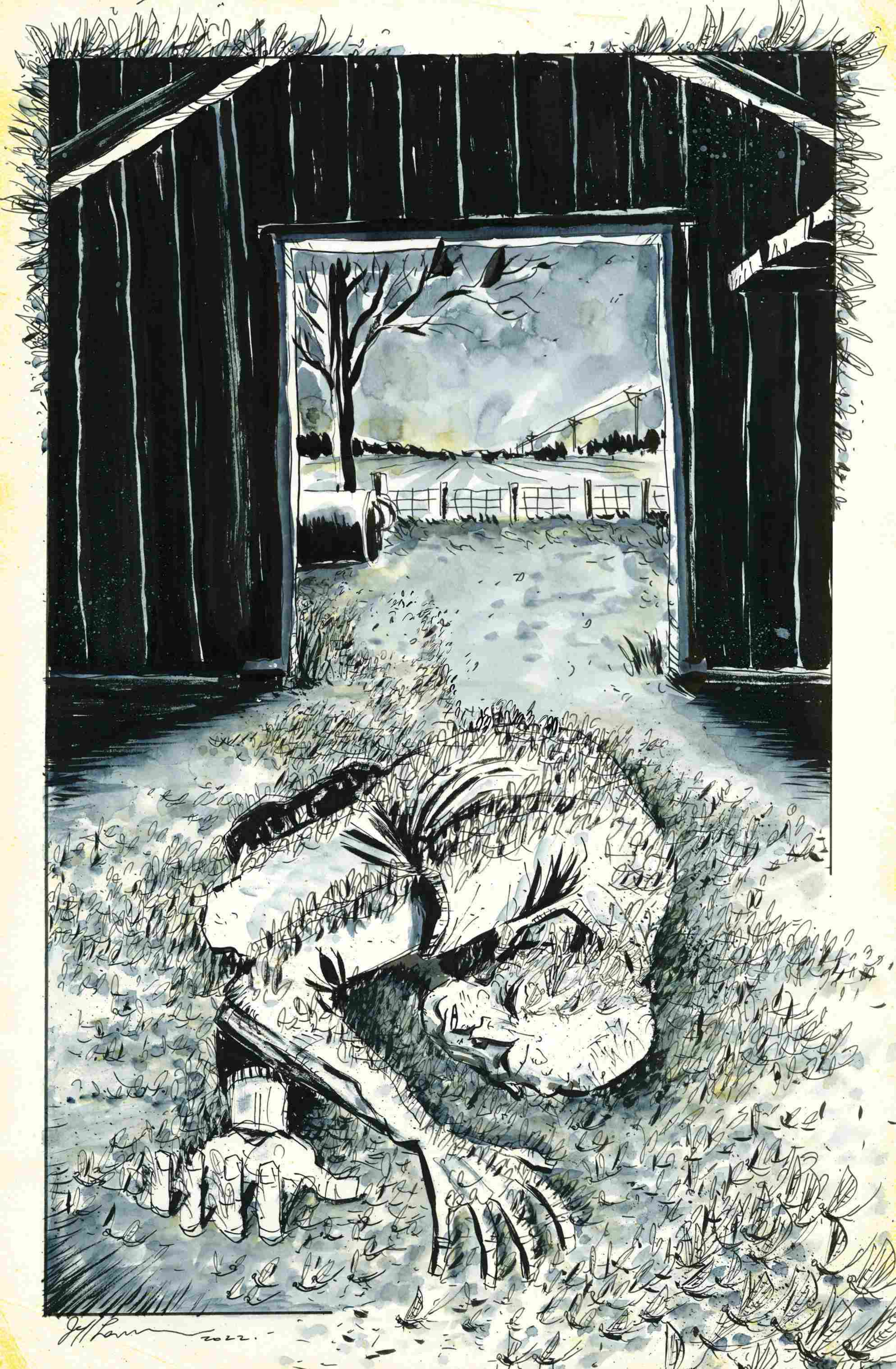
I... POPSICLES--

FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE?!



--UNGHH...

--NGGH!



SPLASH!
SPLASH!

-SNIFF!

-SNIFF!

POKE-POKE

VR.R.R.R.R.R

—SNIFF!

-PTSSSS

MORNING, FRAN.

HI.

:SNIFF:!

SNOTRAG.

FUCKING GROSS.

CREEPS ME OUT.

SCHOOL BUS

POLICE

BELLE RIVER
mini-mart
Open
7 days

POLICE

POLICE

PSST!

HEY! WAKE UP.

YOU GOTTA GET UP. MY DAD WILL BE HOME SOON.

WHO-- WHO ARE YOU?

=SNIFF= FRANNY.

THIS IS MY BARN. WELL, IT'S MY DAD'S BARN. HE'LL BE HOME FROM WORK SOON SO YOU CAN'T STAY HERE. THEY SENT US HOME FROM SCHOOL EARLY 'CAUSE SOME BAD STUFF HAPPENED.

IT'S BECAUSE OF YOU, RIGHT? YOU DID SOMETHING BAD, HUH?

I--I DIDN'T MEAN IT.

S'OKAY. I DO BAD STUFF ALL THE TIME. MY DAD IS ALWAYS MAD AND PUNISHING ME FOR IT.

--HURTS SO BAD.

WELL, THEM BUGS BIT YOU PRETTY GOOD.

THOUGHT-- THOUGHT THAT WAS JUST A DREAM.

=SNIFF= UH UH. THEY'RE ALL OVER.

ALL DEAD NOW, THOUGH. THOSE KIND OF BUGS DON'T LIVE VERY LONG.

I--I THINK ONE OF THEM CRAWLED INSIDE OF ME.

THAT'S GROSS.

MAYBE I CAN GET YOU SOME MEDICINE. WE HAVE SOME STUFF IN THE HOUSE, I THINK. BUT FIRST YOU GOTTA GO SOMEWHERE ELSE, OKAY?

IF MY DAD FINDS YOU HERE, HE'S GONNA BE *REAL MAD.*

AND I THINK THERE ARE POLICEMEN LOOKING FOR YOU. I SEEN THEIR CARS IN TOWN, AND ON THE WAY HOME I EVEN SAW SOME WALKING IN THE FIELDS WITH DOGS.

DON'T FEEL GOOD. FEEL... SO WEIRD.

CAN YOU WALK?

DON'T KNOW.

WELL, YOU GOTTA AT LEAST TRY.

COME ON. I CAN TAKE YOU TO MY SECRET SPOT BUT YOU GOTTA ***PROMISE*** NOT TO TELL ANYONE ABOUT IT, OKAY?

SO, DO YOU?

WHAT?

--YEAH.

DO YOU ***PROMISE*** NOT TO TELL ANYONE?

:SNIFF: SO SAY IT. THEN.

I PROMISE.

GOOD. THIS IS IT. NO ONE COMES HERE NO MORE EXCEPT ME.

SEE? IT'S LIKE MY FORT. I GO HERE SOMETIMES WHEN I WANNA BE BY MYSELF OR IF MY DAD IS REAL MAD OR HE'S BEEN DRINKING MORE THAN BEER.

I DON'T--I REALLY DON'T FEEL RIGHT.

MAYBE YOU JUST NEED TO SLEEP SOME MORE. SOMETIMES WHEN I DON'T FEEL GOOD OR I'VE BEEN BAD, I JUST COME HERE AND SLEEP IN THE DARK.

I--I DIDN'T MEAN TO DO IT. I WAS ALL FUCKED UP. I DIDN'T SEE THE KID AND THEN--

YOU SHOULDN'T SWEAR. 'SPECIALLY IF YOU WANT GOD TO FORGIVE YOU.

I'M SORRY.

S'OKAY.

THE COPS... DID YOU SEE THEM CLOSE BY?

NAH. THEY WERE ALL UP BY TOWN.

IS HE-- DID HE DIE?

WHO?

YOU GOTTA BELIEVE ME. I WAS MESSED UP. I--I DIDN'T WANT TO HURT ANYONE. BUT THEN--

YOU ALREADY SAID THAT.

WHY--WHY IS THIS HAPPENING TO ME?

BECAUSE YOU DID A BAD THING. NOW YOU'RE BEING PUNISHED. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS.

BUT MY MOM ALWAYS USED TO SAY THAT IF YOU PRAY, IT WILL BE OKAY. IF YOU WANT I'LL PRAY WITH YOU. WANT TO?

NO.

OKAY. WELL, I GUESS I GOTTA GO NOW. MY DAD WILL BE HOME SOON AND I GOTTA MAKE SUPPER BEFORE HE GETS HOME.

I'LL TRY AND SAVE YOU SOME AND BRING IT TO YOU LATER. AND I'LL SEE WHAT MEDICINE WE GOT, TOO. OKAY?

WHY--WHY ARE YOU HELPING ME?

...

DON'T KNOW. 'CAUSE YOU NEED HELP.

'KAY. BYE. SEE YOU LATER. YOU TRY AND PRAY AND SLEEP, OKAY?

HI, DADDY.

WHERE YOU BEEN?

JUST PLAYING OUTSIDE.

HEAR ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED LAST NIGHT?

THEY SENT US HOME EARLY.

...

WHAT EXACTLY DID HAPPEN? THEY DIDN'T TELL US.

SOME KID GOT SHOT.

I DON'T WANT YOU GOING OUT NO MORE.

DID YOU *HEAR WHAT I JUST SAID?*

YES.

THEN ANSWER ME WHEN I TALK TO YOU. AND *WIPE YOUR GODDAMN NOSE.*

YES, SIR.

SNIFF

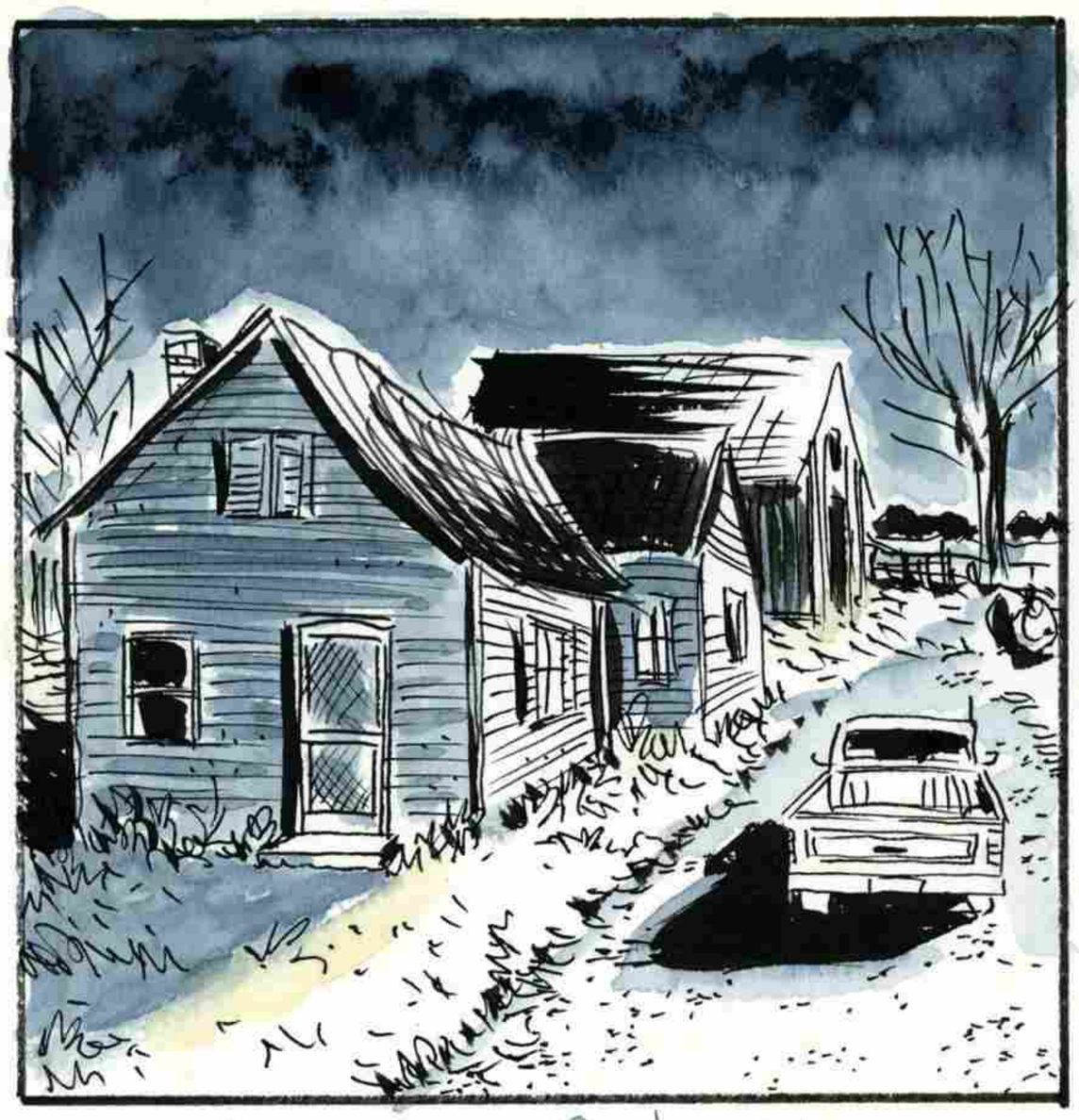
I'M GONNA MAKE SUPPER. WANT SOME?

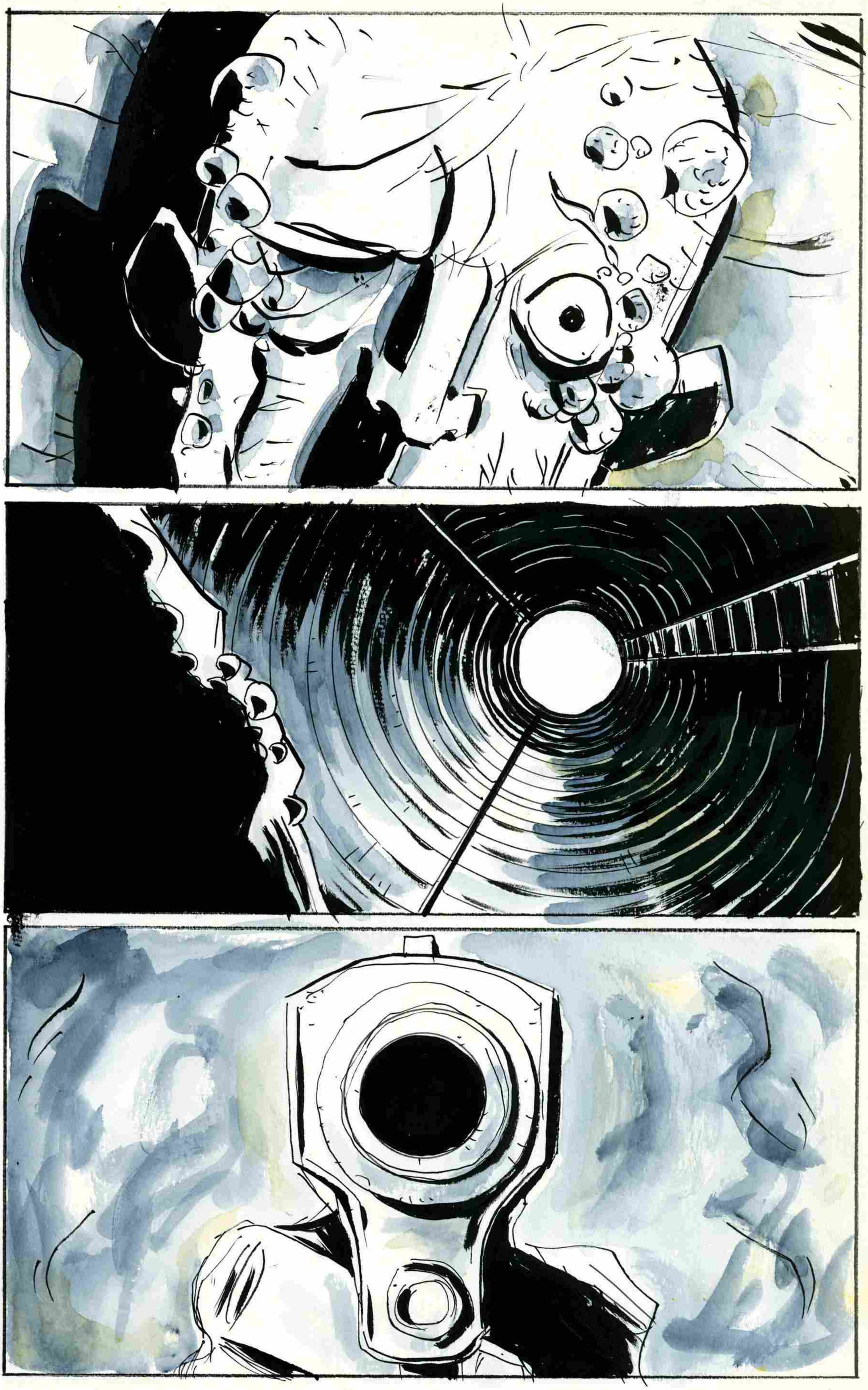
NOT HUNGRY.

CRUNCH!

CRUNCH-

-CRUNCH

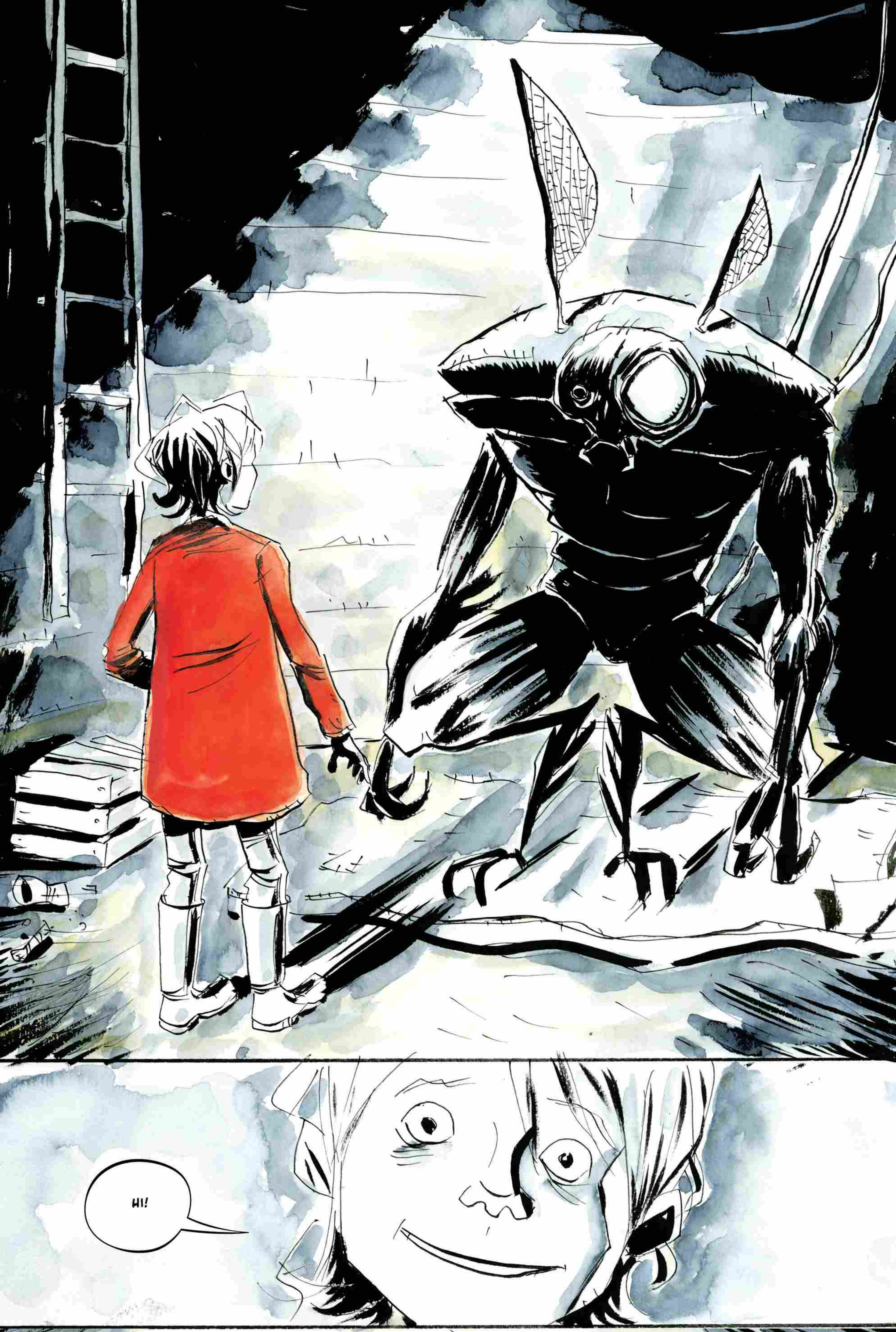




SKRRTCH!

HELLO?

OH!


HI!

Jeff Lemire 2.23

# FISHFLIES, CIGARETTES AND COMIC BOOKS

Long before I began working on this series, fishflies and comic books had forever been linked in my mind. One night, when I was in my late teens, or early 20s, I had a strange experience. Let me explain…

Every year in the lakeside communities in Essex County, where I grew up, a plague occurs. For about two or three weeks, every summer, the lakeside areas of Essex County, like Belle River, are literally blanketed with small, winged insects which the locals call fishflies. Their name comes from the fact that they come off the water, in this case Lake Eerie, and actually smell like fish. Some other Ontario communities, like North Bay, call them Shadflies (but more on that later).

At any rate, these fishflies cover every inch of the sidewalks, streets and storefronts near the lake for a couple weeks, tormenting shop owners and pedestrians, until they all die off at once. You can imagine the smell and the mess. It's pretty gross. Well, one night, I was driving to meet some friends, and made a quick pit-stop at the Belle River Minimart (the very one shown in this first issue) to buy cigarettes. The parking lot and was blanketed with fishflies and I can remember the sickening crunch and pop under my shoes as I walked towards the store. Once inside the store, I did what I always did before grabbing smokes, and checked the magazine rack to see what new comics they had. This was during the only period in my life where I was more interested in smoking and drinking with my friends than I was in comics. For a few years I wasn't actively buying comics, but I still liked to keep an eye on the newest issues when the opportunity arose, as it did that night. That memory clung to me the same way those fishflies clung to the light of the minimart window. But, like so many other things, It sort of faded to some dormant part of my brain over time.

Cut to about twenty years later and I was back visiting family in Essex County and it was fishfly season again. I had just finished my graphic novel *Mazebook* and my antennae were out for new ideas. I had it in my mind to do a sort of rural crime story. That was a genre I hadn't really tackled yet. I was originally thinking of something that was a little more Brubaker and Phillips but in a small town. But no ideas were really coming until I saw those disgusting fishflies again. The scene that opens this story pretty much appeared fully formed in my head all at once. The teenaged boys crossing the minimart parking lot to buy candy and betting each other to step on the fishflies only to stumble upon a robbery in progress with tragic consequences.

It was a good scene, but not a story yet. So, it sat for a while until other ideas started to cling to it. Those other ideas centered around a totally separate idea I was thinking about, a monster story. I had this vision of a little girl and a huge monster running around together. When this idea and the fishfly idea met, Franny Fox was born and so was the book you just read.

*Fishflies* had a strange gestation and development period and it hasn't been the easiest book to do. I had finished the first two chapters when I received an email from Nick Spencer. Nick had taken a job with the email newsletter platform, Substack. Substack wanted to sign a number of high-profile cartoonists and comic book creators to publish new work via their platform. And, while I admit I'd never considered publishing comics online, Nick made a compelling case, and if I am being completely honest, offered a

substantial sum of money. Since I already had a good chunk of *Fishflies* done, I decided to split it up into 5 or 6 page mini-chapters and serialize it through my new Substack newsletter. I did this from August 2021 to August 2022. But, as is often the case, the story continued to evolve and change the deeper I got into it and I went back and revised some of the early scenes and characters. So, the version serialized on Substack is actually a "first draft" with some differences from the final version published here. Those early *Fishflies* chapters can still be accessed on my Substack jefflemire.substack.com along with many other process posts and behind-the-scenes looks at all my books.

I was just starting to draw chapter four when another huge curveball came my way. I had been developing the TV adaptation of my *Essex County* graphic novel for several years. But, as these things go, it didn't seem like it was going to happen…until it did. Suddenly in February 2022, the *Essex* show was a go and I was writing every episode (along with brilliant co-writer Eilish Kirwan) and showrunning the production and we were set to start filming in August 2022. So, my life got turned upside-down. For the first time in almost twenty years, I wasn't able to make comics every day. Instead, I was in endless meetings about costumes, casting, locations etc. and then I had to relocate about four hours north of Toronto to North Bay where we went into production. So, I had to put the half-finished *Fishflies* on hold for almost a year and, with the momentum of day-to-day work broken, I started to lose faith in *Fishflies* all together.

But then another strange coincidence happened. While in pre-production up in North Bay I quickly learned that they too got infested with fishflies for a couple weeks every summer off of Lake Nippissing. But they didn't call them fishflies, they called the shadflies. Fish or shad…they were just as disgusting. They would cling to the *Essex County* production offices each morning and someone had to go out with a broom to clean them away. It was a sign. I knew I had to finish *Fishflies*.

As of this writing, I finished post-production on *Essex County* about a month or so ago and have been back to *Fishflies* full force finishing up the book. It became obvious early that the pace of the story didn't lend itself to the regular 22-page comic book format. The story read much better in larger chunks. So, after a lot of back and forth with Eric Stephenson, we settled on publishing *Fishflies* in these extra-length, 64-page, perfect bound issues every other month. I love this format it reminds me of the Elseworlds books DC used to publish when I was a kid. And, for only $5.99 you are getting the equivalent of three regular-sized comic issues for less than the price of two. Also, for those who love to wait for trades, these bi-monthly volumes are the trades. We won't be collecting them into trades. When the entire 350-page story is done, we may eventually do a complete hardcover, but for now, these big issues are the book.

I also wanted to thank the immensely talented Peach Momoko for her gorgeous alternate cover to this issue. There will be other variant covers coming, including an amazing one by the legendary Kelley Jones!

So, I hope you stick around! This strange story of small-town crime, unexpected friendship and the supernatural is just getting started. Next month Franny finally meets the Fishfly and all hell breaks loose in Belle River!

See you soon!

Jeff Lemire
May 2023
Toronto, Canada

**Coming In September!**

**WANTED**
**DO NOT APPROACH**

Rated M | Mature 18+